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# SOME INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

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## AN ADDRESS

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AT THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL EDU-  
CATION ASSOCIATION HELD IN MADISON SQUARE  
GARDEN, NEW YORK CITY, ON JULY 6, 1916

BY

HON. WILLIAM G. McADOO  
SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY



PRESENTED BY MR. FLETCHER

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ADDRESS BY HON. WILLIAM G. McADOO

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.

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It gives me peculiar pleasure to accept the invitation with which you have so generously honored me, because it offers me the opportunity of bringing to your attention some important questions relating to public education which have been forcibly impressed upon me as a result of my recent visit to South America.

### IDEAL PAN AMERICANISM.

At the great international conference recently held in Buenos Aires, in which all the Republics of the Western Hemisphere, except Mexico, were represented, there was a common impulse to realize the inspiring ideal of that beneficent Pan Americanism which for almost a century, has been the dream of the foremost statesmen of the American Continents. Men of intellectual force and commanding character exchanged ideas and discussed the means of achieving the great purpose in view. It was recognized that public education directed along right lines would be a potential influence in creating that better understanding through which "Americans of both continents may be drawn together in bonds of honorable partnership and mutual advantage," and realize the more securely and effectively those common ideals of individual liberty, national independence, and self-government which are the most vital features of our western civilization.

What is Pan Americanism?

President Wilson, in his message to the Congress, December, 1915, admirably defined it when he said:

That the States of America are not hostile rivals but cooperating friends, and that their growing sense of community of interest, alike in matters political and in matters economic, is likely to give them a new significance as factors in international affairs and in the political history of the world. It presents them as in a very deep and true sense a unit in world affairs, spiritual partners, standing together because thinking together, quick with common sympathies and common ideals. Separated they are subject to all the cross currents of the confused politics of a world of hostile rivalries; united in spirit and purpose they can not be disappointed of their peaceful destiny.

This is Pan Americanism. It has none of the spirit of empire in it. It is the embodiment, the effectual embodiment, of the spirit of law and independence and liberty and mutual service.

What may be called the spiritual ideal of Pan Americanism has been very highly developed and in a large measure actually realized during the past two years—particularly since the European war has forced upon the peoples of the three Americas a larger contact with

each other through the circumstances of political and economic necessity. This larger intercourse is a most happy augury for the future because it means that the spiritual ideal of Pan Americanism will be fortified immeasurably by the ties of mutual interest and reciprocally beneficial trade relations, which, as all history has shown, are the surest guaranties of enduring friendship between nations. But we can not realize these great things unless we understand each other and unless we trust each other.

#### CONFIDENCE DETHRONES SUSPICION.

There is no doubt that until quite recently Latin America has been suspicious of the United States. Our power has been feared and our purposes have been distrusted. Rivals of the United States for Latin-American trade have skillfully fed this suspicion, which was greatly augmented by the unfortunate incident with Colombia growing out of the Panama Canal affair. That produced a very unhappy impression and has been very prejudicial to our standing in Latin America. It would, in fact, be extremely hurtful if it was not for the belief now generally entertained in South and Central America that the pending treaty between the United States and Colombia will be ratified ultimately and that Colombia will be justly compensated for the injury she has sustained. For my part I earnestly hope for this result. This great Nation must always be the exemplar and champion of justice and fair dealing. We must be scrupulously fair, even to the extent of generosity, in our relations with weaker nations. We must accord them in fullest measure what we would unhesitatingly exact of any power for ourselves.

The policies of the President during the last two years, as outlined in his public speeches and his messages to the Congress, have largely counteracted these unfortunate influences and have produced a profound and favorable impression in South and Central America. Our acceptance of the tender of friendly offices by some of the South American States in delicate matters of diplomacy established a new precedent and showed our appreciation of their friendship and of their importance in the family of nations. But the thing which has done most to destroy suspicion and to create confidence was the President's recent suggestion to all the Governments of Central and South America of the willingness of the United States to enter into treaties with them for mutual guaranties of territorial integrity and political independence. This is in effect an enlargement of the Monroe doctrine, because it offers to our southern neighbors assurances against aggression on the part of the United States in addition to the protection they already have, under the Monroe doctrine, against the extension of European systems of government to any part of the American Continent. It is a noble expression of the unselfish purpose of the United States to maintain the principles of true democracy throughout the Western Hemisphere. With the territorial integrity and political independence of every American State secured against European interference, against aggression by the United States, and against aggression as between themselves, a glorious opportunity will be presented for the development of their resources and the growth of their civilization under the fructifying influences of established peace and friendship.



## EDUCATION A PARAMOUNT FACTOR.

After these really splendid achievements what else remains to be done? The promotion of a better understanding between the peoples themselves of the several American States is the next great step. Transportation, communication, and trade relations are invaluable and indispensable agencies, but education is a paramount factor. The Treasury Department, with its varied and important activities, is in itself a kind of university extensions system, and as Secretary of the Treasury I am obliged to be something of a schoolmaster myself. So I have a sympathetic comprehension of the problems with which you have to deal and of the profound importance of the work you are doing in shaping and training the matériel on which the usefulness and permanency of democratic institutions must rest not only in the United States but throughout the Americas. The public-school system is the very foundation of an intelligent and enlightened democracy.

There is probably no school system in the world which is subjected to such constant and searching analysis and criticism as that of the United States. This is due not so much to the defects of the system as to the fact that under our plan of school administration it is the public opinion of the community which finally determines the organization, the purposes, and the trend of the educational system. While this has been the source of some weakness, it has had the great advantage of keeping the standards of public instruction in relatively close touch with national needs. In order that our educational system may perform its high mission, it is necessary that it should reflect every change in our national life, meeting every new need as soon as it arises.

We are at the present moment going through one of those evolutionary changes which fundamentally affect our international relations and involve a heavy obligation on the common-school system of our country.

## NEGLECT OF LATIN AMERICA IN THE CURRICULUM OF OUR SCHOOLS.

What I learned in South America impressed me deeply with the grave disadvantages accruing to our national life and to our international relations because of our widespread ignorance not only of the history but of the significance of the profound changes that have been taking place in the countries of South and Central America during the last 50 years and of the importance of the civilization that is developing in that section of the American continent. I do not mean to criticize, but simply to record a fact, when I say that the public schools of the United States have not contributed their full share toward inculcating in the youth of the country a proper understanding of the political, economic, and social development of our sister Republics. It is this lack of understanding that has prevented the growth of a sufficiently enlightened public opinion in the United States with reference to Latin-American affairs. It is this absence of sympathetic comprehension that makes it so easy to mislead public opinion in the United States and so often to cause unwitting injury to our Latin-American relations.

American history is taught as if it begins and ends with the history of the United States; American geography is interpreted as if it were the geography of the United States. In the study of commerce and industry the provincial view is too frequently taken that Latin America is merely a sort of supply of raw material for the United States. It is no wonder that the average boy and girl are inclined to look upon the vast territories to the south of us as a wilderness, the seat of a backward civilization and peopled by a backward race.

#### INSPIRING DEVELOPMENT OF INDEPENDENT NATIONS.

I am sure that it is not necessary for me to burden you with arguments emphasizing the desirability of acquainting the youth of the country with the economic, political, and social conditions of the continent on which they live; but I do wish to point out the great national service that can be performed in making our young men and women better acquainted with the history, the literature, and the important cultural elements that enter into the great civilization that is developing in Latin America. Our present lack of understanding is a source of national weakness because it is a real obstacle to the development of that spirit of international cooperation without which we can not hope to develop that genuine Pan Americanism for which we are all laboring and toward which we are making real progress.

The history of the Spanish-American struggle for independence is a most inspiring record. The obstacles that the North American colonies had to overcome were not so formidable as those which confronted the revolted Spanish colonies. The decades immediately succeeding the first movement for independence present, in the face of almost overwhelming discouragements, a record of devotion, self-sacrifice, and unswerving faith in the ultimate triumph of free institutions which compel the deepest respect and admiration. The story of this struggle, if properly presented and interpreted, would mean much to the youth of our country. It would make them appreciate the similarity of ideals which dominated the founders of the political system of the United States and the leaders of Latin-American independence, and would serve to develop a sympathetic understanding of the political life and institutions of these countries. We are apt to think of Central and South America as a whole, without any appreciation of the fact that each country has passed through a different process, and that the history of the nineteenth century is a history of adaptation of political institutions to the economic, racial, and social environment peculiar to each, resulting in great diversity in form of government and in diversity no less striking in the operation of political institutions.

During the last century the American Continent has been the great laboratory of political evolution, furnishing a body of material to the teacher of history and civics which we have hardly begun to utilize.

#### COMPULSORY TEACHING OF SPANISH.

The development of that true spirit of continental solidarity with the peoples of Central and South America for which we are striving would be set forward immeasurably if we would give more attention



to their language and literature. The teaching of Spanish should be made compulsory in our public schools; in fact, a resolution was unanimously adopted by the International High Commission at Buenos Aires recommending to each Government that in all schools supported by public funds or aided in any way by public funds the study of English, Spanish, and Portuguese should be obligatory. It is astonishing that so few people in our country, relatively speaking, understand that in the most populous Republic in South America—Brazil—the language is Portuguese and not Spanish. We do not pay enough attention to the study of Spanish in our schools, while, on the other hand, English is taught to a very large extent in the schools of South America.

At the present time we rarely think of citing Latin American publicists and scientists. Practically no reference is ever made to Latin American literature. We pay little attention to the currents of thought of Central or South America; unmindful of the fact that important contributions have been made and are constantly being made in every department of literary and scientific effort. I would not for a moment disparage the study of French or German, nor belittle the treasures which a knowledge of these languages unfolds, but I do wish to submit to you the desirability of acquainting our youth with the intellectual effort and the intellectual achievement of the American Continent.

#### THE METRIC SYSTEM.

I also wish to make a plea for closer cooperation between the Republics of the American Continent in matters affecting the ordinary transactions of daily life. From a great number of possible contributions to this end the question of uniformity in standards of weights and measures is of the utmost importance. I doubt whether any of us fully appreciate the extent to which diversity of standards, as in other matters, represents a barrier to closer international cooperation. The metric system has been universally accepted throughout Latin America. Acceptance of this system in the United States, if it ever comes, will depend in large measure on the growth of a body of opinion favorable to the system developed in the public schools of the country. But whether we adopt it or not we should study it more effectively in our public schools, because our relations with Latin America will constantly increase and we must equip our youths to meet their responsibilities in these new fields with credit to themselves and honor to their country.

#### THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL.

I have welcomed the opportunity to lay these matters before you because their importance was constantly impressed upon me in connection with the work of the International High Commission. That great body was created by the 21 American Republics for the express purpose of removing the obstacles to closer financial and commercial cooperation and larger intercourse between the Republics of America. Every thoughtful person must recognize the fact that the public schools can contribute effectively toward the accomplishment of this desirable end. It is largely a matter of education.



Upon you, men and women of the National Education Association, rests the ultimate responsibility of making effective the policy of Pan Americanism formulated by our President in a series of addresses which have resounded throughout the entire Western Hemisphere; upon you rests the task of developing in the youth of the country a broader understanding of the forces that have shaped American history, a keener appreciation of the significance of the development of free institutions on the American Continent, and a deeper sympathy with the aspirations of sister nations who, like ourselves, are endeavoring to translate into realities the ideals of American democracy.

